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ABSTRACT

The authors discuss the ways in which a principal uses his time and provide suggestions for using it more efficiently. (IRT)

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THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE

X. L. Garrison and Elizabeth H. Hardin

How do you spend the time of your life - professional life, that is? Peter Drucker[1] reminds us that the measure of the executive is the ability to "get the right things done!" The effective principal gets the right things done at the right time; he must, therefore, control his time, and budget its expenditure wisely. Without purposeful control the principal's time can be frittered away by demands that make little or no contribution to his real job which is to provide educational leadership. Ceremony takes time; people want to talk; and conventions are to be attended. But the principal's job is to provide educational leadership for his school; such leadership requires time - lots of time.

Before the principal can plan his time, he must know where his time is going, and memory tends to be faulty. Either the principal or his secretary should keep a time record of his activities for a period of several weeks. A careful review of this record will reveal the ways he is currently spending his time. Now he can review his activities, assign priorities, and reallocate his time and energies for maximum educational results. The following ideas may help him as he examines and replaces[2] his use of time.

The principal should identify those chores he must personally do; he should then consolidate these necessary administrative trivia that dribble away his time, and keep them within certain hours. This will enable him to allocate other large blocks of time for instructional

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leadership and supervision. Effective supervision requires at least a full period in the classroom; a conference with a teacher should not be interrupted until all points are covered. Telephone calls can wait until the observation or conference is completed.

The principal meets with many publics - teachers, students, parents, staff people, and superiors; therefore, he must see how each person relates to his prime function. The principal who tries to see many people for short periods of time will be less effective than the one who allocates blocks of time to major concerns. Therefore, the "open door" policy should be reviewed frequently. The salesman paying a courtesy call, the teacher with a free period to kill, deprives the principal of time to meet those with whom he needs to be in contact.

The more people involved in an activity and the more time these people are together, the more time personal relations will take. For this reason only those people who need to participate should attend meetings; others should be informed through distribution of minutes or reports. Before a meeting is held an agenda should be supplied to those participating. This enables them to do their homework in advance and will decrease the amount of time spent on background information. A good way to judge the quality of a meeting is to listen for unrelated questions which show that participants are either uninformed or misinformed. If only the right people are involved fewer people will usually accomplish more in less time. For example, a problem which is primarily the concern of one department should be solved by the principal and that department alone, rather than in a meeting of the total faculty.

Most schools have too many meetings. A good administrative bulletin can replace a majority of the "so-called" faculty meetings. Unnecessary meetings are usually caused by faulty organization or by personal needs of leaders. An individual can either work or meet, but he cannot do both at the same time. If a person knows what he needs to do, knows how to do it, and has the necessary resources, there is no need for meetings. When a meeting is necessary it should be carefully planned and purposefully directed. An undirected meeting is not only a waste of time and an insult to participants; it can be dangerous.

Personnel decisions - hiring, promoting, demoting or firing - are important decisions that cannot be delegated; the principal, therefore, should take time to study carefully and make each decision thoughtfully. Since the perfect person for each position is seldom available, these decisions are difficult. We do not look for the person with the fewest weaknesses but for the available person with the most strengths. Personnel problems, then, are usually compromises which call for the allocation of adequate time for thorough study.

Innovation and change demand frequent decisions by the principal. Deciding whether to initiate change and choosing which innovations are to be made requires much study and consultation. Personnel decisions are usually involved along with choosing materials and planning in-service education.

An unfortunate waste of time is overstaffing; this results in time wasted in personal relations and forces the principal to spend an undue amount of time on "human relations" - feuds, hurt feelings, and questions

of cooperation. Too large a staff means that people get in one another's way and have to spend too much time explaining what and why. A good staff should be able to work without colliding.

Delegation is an overworked and often misunderstood word. It does not mean getting somebody to do the principal's work for him; it means permitting and expecting each person to do the work for which he is paid. The principal can delegate ceremonial tasks and attendance at meetings to the individual most closely connected with the activity. The person delegated will probably feel honored; the principal will have more time for his main task - instructional leadership.

If a task is repetitive, a secretary can do it. If a crisis reappears at intervals it should be prevented or reduced to a routine task shared by those concerned. A well run school like a well planned trip is uneventful ~~by~~ but enjoyable; there should be few surprises and even fewer disappointments.

When the principal has analyzed his present use of time and set up new plans for more effective use of his time and energies, his secretary and staff can help him to implement it. The secretary should respect and protect the time he has allocated for instructional leadership and supervision. He will need, also, the cooperation of the staff. The principal should make time available for the staff at regular intervals; in return the staff should not encroach on time reserved for other purposes. After the plan is operative, it should be reviewed at regular intervals. At each review, unproductive activities should be relentlessly pruned from the schedule, no matter how pleasant they may be.

Good principals are a varied lot. Most of them are intelligent, creative, knowledgeable, and ambitious; but poor principals also have these desirable characteristics. The big difference is that the successful principal is willing to pay the price to become a better administrator each year. The successful principal is the one who gets the right things done at the right time; to do this he must control his time and not waste it on administrative trivia.

[1]Drucker, Peter F. The Effective Executive. Harper and Row, New York, 1966.